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Introductory Remarks

Rabbi Nissim Bassalian

As Pesach approaches, Jews all around the world get ready to celebrate the anniversary of freedom from slavery and bondage, to better understand how we, the children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, a tribe of shepherds, became a great nation, and till today remain, and will remain, *be'ezrat Hashem*, the chosen people of Hashem

I can remember those difficult days of preparation in *galut* (the Diaspora), when our *rabbanim* and wise elders were putting every effort to bring a kosher and safe Passover to every Mashadi house. A long process of getting the carefully watched (= '*shemura*') wheat changed into flour, baking kosher *matzah* and distributing them to each family according to their needs, cleaning the houses, while not letting a trace of *chametz* to remain, and arranging a full Seder in every home. Additionally, all the holiday *tefillot* were to be in order and on time.

After the brutal attack to our houses on the 12th of Nissan, 1839, three days before Pesach, and again on the second day of Pesach in 1946, Pesach wasn't without fear, yet was still celebrated and observed with full *emunah* (faith) and dedication. The freedom and glory of today is not achieved cheap and easily. It is because of the heavy price paid by our fathers and mothers, that we are today standing proud and united together. We have to do our share to hand it untouched and unchanged to our next generations. Have a happy and kosher Passover anywhere you may be this Pesach. To you and to all of *Am Yisrael*.

חג כשר ושמח!

Erev Pesach Laws & Guidelines¹
Rabbi Yosef Bitton

**I. Hagalat Kelim:
Preparing your Kitchen**

During Pesach, it is forbidden to use the same cooking utensils or even tableware that was used year-round for *chametz*. It is customary and highly recommended to have a separate set of cookware and tableware for Pesach. If this is not possible, one can still use the year-round utensils after a process of *hagala*, which is a form of sterilization that serves to eliminate any visible traces of *chametz*, and especially particles of *chametz* absorbed in the utensil walls.

Although all different types of *hagala* follow one single principle, the process of *hagala* is different for each type of utensil, depending on the material from which it is made, and the use we give to it.

Some examples of *hagala*:

Glass: According to the Sephardic tradition, clear glass utensils like cups or even plates used throughout the year for *chametz* should be thoroughly washed and they can then be used for Pesach without any further *hagala*.

Metal: Tableware like forks, spoons, or knives are to be thoroughly cleaned and then immersed in a pot of boiling

¹ Adapted from the 2012 *Sephardic Guide for Pesach*.

water. Afterwards, they should be washed with cold water and then may be used for Pesach.

Porcelain: Ceramic, pottery or porcelain china and tableware that we use throughout the year for *chametz* are not suitable for Pesach. In other words *hagala* does not sterilize them; therefore they cannot be used for Pesach.

Sink and countertops: The sink, even when made of porcelain, should be cleaned by pouring on it boiling water. Countertops and tables, if possible, should have boiling water poured on them. If that is not possible they should be covered in order to use them for Pesach. For a regular table, after it is cleaned, use a new tablecloth.

Dishwasher: A day before Pesach, after the dishwasher is completely clean, it should be run on an empty cycle without dishes but with detergent. Then the dishwasher becomes kosher for Passover use.

Oven: The oven should not be used for 24 hours. Then it must go first through a deep cleaning. As follows: if it is a self-cleaning oven, one may run a self-clean cycle, and then it becomes kosher for Passover. If it is not a self-cleaning oven, after it is thoroughly cleaned let the oven run on the highest temperature setting, for an hour, including the racks. Then the oven is kosher for Pesach.

Microwave: After cleaning thoroughly, take a bowl of water, with some detergent or soap in it, and let it boil in the microwave until the microwave walls are filled with steam. The vapor penetrates the walls rendering the microwave kosher for Pesach. (If you can't do this and you

need to use a year--round microwave, cover completely the food in a container or Ziploc products, Saran wrap or any other hermetic microwavable covers).

II. The Eve of Pesach

The prohibition of *chametz* is one of the strictest prohibitions of the whole Torah, and significantly, one of the best kept traditions by Jews worldwide. The Mashadi community is extraordinarily careful in fulfilling this *mitzvah*. Women in our community literally spend months cleaning their houses for Pesach, following a strong ancient tradition of adherence to the highest standards for this important *mitzvah*.

What is so exceptional about the prohibition of *chametz* is that, unlike any other forbidden food, it includes the ban of its possession. Strictly speaking, this is a purely “legal” concept. During Pesach, there cannot be any *chametz* that belongs to us, legally, regardless, of where that *chametz* might be.

Therefore, there are four steps we should follow to strictly avoid this Biblical prohibition:

First, we should clean our houses, cars, offices and other properties before Pesach. Second, we should search all our properties to make sure that we have removed everything *chametz* from them (AKA *bedikat chametz*). Third, we have to physically dispose or get rid of any *chametz* that we have found on our property during the *bedika* (AKA *biur chametz*) and finally, we have to perform a verbal-legal declaration or statement that whatever *chametz* we may

own anywhere, which was not detected and eliminated, does not belong to us anymore and from now on it is considered *ownerless* as the dust of the earth (AKA *bitul chametz*).

III. *Bedikat Chametz*

After the house is cleaned of *chametz* and ready for Pesach, the night before the Seder, at the time of *Tzet haKokhavim* (appearance of three stars), we do *bedikat chametz*, which is the last inspection in which we search for any *chametz* that might have remained in our property after cleaning.

This year, 2014/5774, the night of the *bedika* will be on Sunday, April 13 after 8:15 P.M. That night, with the aid of a candle or a flashlight, we search all spots in our house where we might have brought food in. We should especially search the kitchen, food storage spaces, the pantry, the refrigerator, the freezer, and all other places in which we usually store or keep food.

It is customary among some families in our community to place some *chametz*, for instance pieces of well-wrapped bread, at certain locations before proceeding to do the *bedika*.

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Before starting the *bedika*, we recite the following blessing:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל בְּעוֹר חָמֵץ:

“*Barukh ata A-donai E-loheinu melekh ha'olam asher kiddeshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu 'al biur chametz*”

One single blessing is enough to inspect all properties. Meaning, you would *not* have to repeat the blessing upon checking your office or car after having done so for your home.

Special attention should be given to automobiles, since it is not uncommon to eat snacks in the car. Cars should be washed and cleaned before the night of the *bedika* and then they should be searched for any trace of *chametz*, usually after we search our homes. We should also search our office or place of work because we often bring food there. If it is impossible to search these places right after we do the *bedika* at home, it should be done before the *bedika* or early in the morning of the following day.

Once the *bedika* is finished, we gather all the *chametz* we have found and keep it for the following day, when it will be finally eliminated. We also need to safeguard the *chametz* we will be eating the next morning.

IV. *Bitul Chametz*

After the *bedika* we say the first declaration of the *bitul chametz*:

כָּל חֲמִירָא דְאִינָא בְרִשְׁוֵתִי. דְּלֹא חֲזִיתִיה וְדְלֹא
בִיעַרְתִּיה. לְבַטְלִי וְלַחֲוֵי גְעַפְרָא דְאַרְעָא:

“*Kal chamira deika birshuti delah chaziteh u’delah biarteh, livtil veleheveh ke’afrah dear’ah*”

The translation is:

“*All kinds of chametz or fermenting agents that belong to me, that I haven’t seen or that I haven’t eliminated, should be considered ownerless, as the dust of the earth.*”

The reason for the *bitul* is the following: as we’ve already said, during Pesach the possession of *chametz* is forbidden, whether the *chametz* is in our own house or elsewhere. Therefore, during Pesach there cannot be any *chametz* that belongs to us. Through this statement of *Kal Chamira* we renounce our ownership of any *chametz* that belong to us and that we might not have found. Technically speaking, the *chametz* will become subsequently ownerless, like the dust of the earth. Thus, even if any *chametz* is still found in our property, is not ours anymore.

For this declaration to be valid, it is necessary to understand every word. Thus, one should say it in a language he or she understands.

V. Biur Chametz

The following day, Monday, April 14, in the morning, we may eat *chametz* only until the fourth hour of the day (aprox. 10:00 A.M.). After we finish eating, we take the *chametz* found during the *bedika* together with all the leftover of the *chametz* that remained from our last meal and we proceed to its physical elimination. This is usually done by burning the *chametz* in a safe place, but it can also be done by disposing it, throwing it in a lake or a river or by feeding it to the birds.

After the *biur* we must once again do the *bitul*. But unlike the one of the prior night, this time the declaration is more comprehensive. This is because it not only includes the *chametz* that we have not seen or that we do not know about, but also the *chametz* that we have seen and found and just finished to eat. All the laws for the first *bitul* apply for this *bitul* too.

The following is the declaration of the final Bitul:

כָּל חֲמִצָּה דְאִיכָּא בְרִשְׁוֹתַי. דְחֲזִיתִיה וְדִלָּא חֲזִיתִיה
דְבִיעֲרֵתָהּ וְדִלָּא בִיעֲרֵתָהּ לְכַמְטִיל וְלִחְנוּי בְּעַפְרָא דְאַרְעָא:

“*Kal chamira deika birushti; dechaziteh u’delah chaziteh, debiarteht u’delah biarteht, livtil veleheveh ke’afrah dear’ah.*”

The translation is:

“*All kind of chametz or fermenting agent that belongs to me, that I have or have not seen and that I have or have not*

eliminated, should be considered ownerless, as the dust of the earth."

The *bitul* must be done until Monday, April 14 before 11.00 A.M. (the fifth hour of the day). Once this *bitul* is done no more contact with *chametz* is allowed until Pesach is over.

VI. Pesach Out-of-Town

When someone will be out-of-town for Pesach, the cleaning and the *bedika* of his home should be done the night before leaving town, but without saying any *berakha*. The *chametz* found should be eliminated or sold. The night of the *bedika*, Sunday, April 13, one should search for *chametz* again in the house or in the hotel room where he is going to stay for Pesach. The next day, one should proceed to do the *biur* and the *bitul* of the *chametz* found the day before. When one does the *bitul* and declares the *chametz* ownerless, he has to include in his thoughts not only the *chametz* found in his present location, but also and especially the *chametz* that could have remained inadvertently at home.

VII. Mekhirat Chametz

In some communities, mainly Ashkenazi, it is customary to sell the *chametz* through the local rabbinate to a non-Jew. In Sephardic communities it was not customary to sell the *chametz*, unless it was an exceptional case, like when someone owned a food store. Traditionally, Sephardic Jews got rid of all their *chametz*, and if some *chametz* had not being detected, the *bitul* would take care

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of it. However, nowadays many community members keep valuable *chametz* products like whiskey or liquors made from grain alcohol during Pesach. When this is the case, the only way to avoid transgressing the prohibition of owning *chametz* during Pesach is by selling it.

In our community, Rabbi Ben Haim arranges the selling of the *chametz* by a special form that should be signed and given to the Gabbaim on time. To sell the *chametz*, this form should be filled out and brought to the *gabbaim* in our synagogue as early as possible. See the forms of *mekhirat chametz* in one of our synagogues or download it from one of the community web site. Again, **whenever possible, the best and the traditional way to proceed is to physically get rid of the liquors, whiskey, etc, along with all the other *chametz* products before Pesach.**

VIII. Taanit Bekhorot

In order to persuade Pharaoh to let the Jewish people go out of Egypt, the Almighty inflicted upon them ten plagues. The last one, the plague that finally persuaded Pharaoh to let the people go, was the death of the firstborn. While every Egyptian firstborn was killed, the Jewish firstborn were saved, because the Almighty “...*pasach al batei benei yisrael bemitzraim benogfo et mitzraim*—protected the houses of the people of Israel, at the time he was inflicting the Egyptians (the firstborn).” In remembrance of this special protection, this festival is named “Pesach” and the firstborn fast is on the morning of Pesach eve (**Monday, April 14**).

In our community, this fast is only customary for firstborn males, not females. In case the firstborn is a small boy, the Mashadi tradition is that the father fasts on his son's behalf. If on the fast day there is a *brit mila*, a *pidyon haben* or a *siyum masekhet*, and the firstborn is present at the event, he will be exempted from the fast. It is customary, then, that the Rabbi of the community arranges for a *siyum masekhet* for that day, so the firstborns would circumvent the fast and thus won't feel weak at the time of the Seder.

Many families in our community have the tradition that when the firstborn breaks the fast, they do not eat *chametz* anymore. Additionally, the female firstborn also refrain from eating *chametz*.

IX. Akhilat Matzah on Pesach Eve

On Pesach eve, one should not eat *matzah*. We keep the *matzah* for its ideal moment: The night of the Seder. We are allowed to eat *matza ashirah* or egg matza, though.

X. FAQ's

The following are some of the questions I received in previous years. I hope the answers will shed some light onto things that were not discussed at length.

Q: Am I allowed to use my tablecloths and dish towels that I usually use during the year after I wash them or it is better to use new ones?

A: It is sufficient to wash them.

Q: You said that we can use our glass dishes for Passover after we wash them thoroughly. Are we allowed to use glass even if they have cuttings on them like crystal (i.e., glasses that don't have a smooth surface on them)?

A: If they are thoroughly washed, you are allowed to use them because there is no absorption/expulsion of any *chametz* particles at the level of glass walls.

Q: Does fresh fish have to be kosher for Passover?

A: No. Any kosher fish year-round is also Kosher for Pesach. Same thing goes for fresh *unprocessed* meat.

Q: I have a baby should I buy new bottles for him?

A: You do not need to buy new bottles. You can wash them with hot water, almost in the same way you would do to sterilize them. Look on the section *hagalat keilim* for more information.

Q: Can we use a matzah or other kosher for Passover products from last year?

A: Although it is halakhically allowed to use *kasher lepesach* products left from the previous Pesach (*matzah*

from last year does not become *chametz*), it is traditional to recommend *our* community, following a Mashadi tradition, to use newly prepared Passover products. Obviously, when somebody is using a product from last year it should be still in a sealed package bearing the *kasher lepesach* sign. (I thank Mr. Nassim Bassalian for this information.)

Q: If the housekeeper has chametz in her room for herself is that OK?

A: We should instruct all people who work at our house or office not to bring anything *chametz* inside during Pesach. Now, if the housekeeper or any of your employees brings something anyway, despite your warning and without your knowledge, you are not accountable for it and you are not liable for the transgression of possessing *chametz* during Pesach, because, although the *chametz* is located in your premises it does not belong to you. Still, you have to be very careful that not leftovers of their *chametz* food will be in contact with any of your food.

Q: Can saffron be used for Pesach?

A: Pereg Saffron (Israel) can be used for Pesach, even without the Kosher for Passover sticker. Any other pure 100% Saffron, like Spanish and Persian Saffron, could also be used.

Q: I have silver-plated napkin holders and spoon and fork holders. I don't know what the procedure is, do I have to clean them for Passover or should I to put them away and have new ones?

A: If they are thoroughly washed, you are allowed to use them for Pesach.

Q: I would like to ask you about bottled water that we use with the dispensers, most people use Poland Spring, and we use Deer Park. I would like to know if they are OK to use for Passover.

A: Yes, every mineral water is OK for pesach. Clean the dispenser thoroughly.

Q: Can we use brown rice for Pesach?

A: Yes, if there are no additives and it is not enriched!

Q: Do corn starch/baking soda need to be thrown out?

A: No. You can keep it. (Actually Baking Soda is OK to use for Pesach, provided is a new, unused package.)

Q: Is talking prohibited between saying the berakha "al biur chametz" until the end of the search and burning of the bread?

A: Talking is allowed between the *berakha* and the *bitul* only if you need to say something related or needed for the *bedika*.

Q: You wrote that it's best to have wine for the Seder night, and if someone is diabetic they can dilute it with water. I wanted to know how much of the cup has to be wine and how much can be water?

A: More than half of the cup should be wine. Make sure the wine you use is 100% wine and does not already have any added water (Some wines are made with a lot of added water!)

Q: Would someone who just had a baby boy (but not done a pidyon haben yet) have to fast for their firstborn son on erev pesach?

A: According to the *minhag* in our community, yes.

Q: I'm a female firstborn, what does the halakha say I should do for taanit bekhoret? I heard that the firstborn is not supposed to eat chametz, but I am not sure if that is for girls as well as guys.

A: In our community, the fast known as *taanit bekhoret* is only customary for firstborn males, not females. Yet, many families in our community have the tradition that males – after they break the fast – and firstborn females, do not eat *chametz* during erev pesach.

**Our Journey in the Haggadah:
How its Narratives and Observances Enable
Experience the Exodus¹**

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

I. Introduction

The Haggadah is a compilation of biblical, Talmudic and midrashic texts, with several other passages that were added over the centuries.² Despite its composite nature, the Haggadah in its current form may be understood as containing a fairly coherent structure. It creates a collective effect that enables us to experience the journey of our ancestors. As the Haggadah exhorts us, we must consider ourselves as though we left Egypt, actively identifying with our forebears rather than merely recounting ancient history.

¹ This article was adapted, with permission, from *Pesah Reader* (New York: Tebah, 2010), pp. 17-29; and reprinted in Angel, *Creating Space between Peshat and Derash* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2011), pp. 218-229.

² Shemuel and Ze'ev Safrai write that most of the core of our Haggadah, including the *kiddush*, the Four Questions, the Four Children, the midrashic readings, Rabban Gamliel, and the blessing at the end of *maggid* originated in the time of the Mishnah and were set by the ninth century. "This is the bread of affliction" (*ha lachma anya*) and "In each generation" (*be-khol dor va-dor*) hail from the ninth to tenth centuries. Components such as the story of the five rabbis at B'nei B'rak and Rabbi Elazar; the *midrash* about the number of plagues at the Red Sea; *Hallel HaGadol* and *Nishmat*; all existed as earlier texts before their incorporation into the Haggadah. "Pour out Your wrath" (*shefokh chamatekha*) and the custom of hiding the *afikoman* are later additions. All of the above was set by the eleventh century. The only significant additions after the eleventh century are the songs at the end (*Haggadat Hazal* [Jerusalem: Karta, 1998], pp. 70–71).

The exodus lies at the root of our eternal covenantal relationship with God.

The Haggadah merges laws with narrative. Its text and symbols take us on a journey that begins with freedom, then a descent into slavery, to the exodus, and on into the messianic era. Although we may feel free today, we are in exile as long as the Temple is not rebuilt. Many of our Seder observances remind us of the Temple and we pray for its rebuilding.

The Haggadah also presents an educational agenda. Although most traditions are passed from the older generation to the younger, the older generation must be open to learning from the younger. Often it is their questions that remind us of how much we still must learn and explore.

This essay will use these axioms to outline the journey of the Haggadah, using the text and translation of Rabbi Marc D. Angel's *A Sephardic Passover Haggadah* (Ktav, 1988). This study is not an attempt to uncover the original historical meaning of the Passover symbols or to explain why certain passages were incorporated into the Haggadah. However, perhaps we will approach the inner logic of our current version of the Haggadah and its symbols as they came to be traditionally understood.

II. The First Four Stages: From Freedom into Slavery

Kadesh: Wine symbolizes festivity and happiness. Kiddush represents our sanctification of time, another sign of freedom. We recline as we drink the wine, a sign of freedom dating back to Greco-Roman times, when the core observances of the Seder were codified by the rabbis of the Mishnah. Some also have the custom of having others pour the wine for them, which serves as another symbol of luxury and freedom. The Haggadah begins by making us feel free and noble.

Rechatz (or Urchatz): We ritually wash our hands before dipping the *karpas* vegetable into salt water or vinegar. As with the pouring of the wine, some have the custom for others to wash their hands, symbolizing luxury and freedom. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (The Netziv, 1817–1893, Lithuania) observes that many Jews no longer follow this Talmudic practice of washing hands before dipping any food into a liquid. Doing so at the Seder serves as a reminder of the practice in Temple times. We remain in freedom mode for *rechatz*, but we begin to think about the absence of the Temple.

Karpas: Dipping an appetizer is another sign of freedom and nobility that dates back to Greco-Roman times. However, we dip the vegetable into either salt water or vinegar, which came to be interpreted as symbolic of the tears of slavery. In addition, the technical ritual reason behind eating *karpas* resolves a halakhic debate over whether we are required to make a blessing of *Borei peri ha'adamah* over the *maror* later.

On the one hand, we eat *maror* after *matzah* and therefore have already washed and recited the blessing of *ha'motzi*. On the other hand, it is unclear whether the *maror* should be subsumed under the meal covered by the *matzah*, since it is its own independent *mitzvah*. Consequently, the *ha'adamah* we recite over the *karpas* absolves us of this doubt, and we are required to keep the *maror* in mind for this blessing.³

Interpreting this halakhic discussion into symbolic terms: while we are dipping an appetizer as a sign of freedom and luxury, we experience the tears of slavery, and we think about the *maror*, which the Haggadah explains as a symbol of the bitterness of slavery.⁴ We are beginning our descent into slavery.

³ See *Pesachim* 114b; *Shulkhan Arukh, Orach Chayim* 473:6; 475:2.

⁴ The symbol of the *maror* underwent an evolution. Joseph Tabory notes that during the Roman meal, the dipping of lettuce as a first course was the most common appetizer. By the fourth century, the Talmud ruled that the appetizer must be a different vegetable (*karpas*) so that the *maror* could be eaten for the first time as a *mitzvah* with a blessing (The JPS Commentary on the Haggadah: Historical Introduction, Translation, and Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2008], pp. 23–24).

In *Pesachim* 39a, one Sage explains that we use *chasa* (romaine lettuce, the talmudically-preferred *maror*, even though five different vegetables are suitable) since God pitied (has) our ancestors. Another Sage derives additional meaning from the fact that romaine lettuce begins by tasting sweet but then leaves a bitter aftertaste. This sensory process parallels our ancestors' coming to Egypt as nobles and their subsequent enslavement.

Yachatz: The Haggadah identifies two reasons for eating *matzah*. One is explicit in the Torah, that our ancestors had to rush out of Egypt during the exodus (*Shemot* 12:39). However, the Haggadah introduces another element: The Israelites ate *matzah* while they were yet slaves in Egypt. The Torah's expression *lechem 'oni*, bread of affliction (*Devarim* 16:3) lends itself to this midrashic interpretation.

Yachatz focuses exclusively on this slavery aspect of *matzah*—poor people break their bread and save some for later, not knowing when they will next receive more food (*Berakhot* 39b). By this point, then, we have descended into slavery. At the same time, the other half of this *matzah* is saved for the *tzafun-afikoman*, which represents the Passover offering and is part of the freedom section of the Seder. Even as we descend into slavery with our ancestors, then, the Haggadah provides a glimpse of the redemption.

To summarize, *kadesh* begins with our experiencing freedom and luxury. *Rechatz* also is a sign of freedom but raises the specter of there no longer being a Temple. *Karpas* continues the trend of freedom but more overtly gives us a taste of slavery by reminding us of tears and bitterness. *Yachatz* completes the descent into slavery. Even before we begin the *maggid*, then, the Haggadah has enabled us to experience the freedom and nobility of the Patriarchs, the descent to Egypt with Joseph and his brothers, and the enslavement of their descendants.

III. Maggid: From Slavery to Freedom

A. Educational Framework

At this point in our journey, we are slaves. We begin the primary component of the Haggadah—*maggid*—from this state of slavery.

Ha Lachma 'Anya: We employ the “bread of affliction” imagery of the *matzah*, since we are slaves now. This opening passage of *maggid* also connects us to our ancestors: “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt....Now we are here enslaved.” The passage begins our experience by identifying with the slavery of our ancestors, then moves into our own exile and desire for redemption.

Mah Nishtanah—The Four Children: Before continuing our journey, we shift our focus to education. The Haggadah prizes the spirit of questioning. The wisdom of the wise child is found in questioning, not in knowledge: “What are the testimonies, statutes, and laws which the Lord our God has commanded you?” To create a society of wise children, the Haggadah challenges us to explore and live our traditions.

'Avadim Hayinu: We are not simply recounting ancient history. We are a living part of that memory and connect to our ancestors through an acknowledgement that all later generations are indebted to God for the original exodus: “If the Holy One blessed be He had not brought out our ancestors from Egypt, we and our children and grandchildren would yet be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt.”

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Ma'aseh BeRibbi Eliezer: The five rabbis who stayed up all night in Bnei Berak teach that the more knowledgeable one is, the more exciting this learning becomes. These rabbis allowed their conversation to take flight, losing track of time as they experienced the exodus and actively connected to our texts and traditions.⁵ This passage venerates our teachers.

Amar Rabbi Elazar: As a complement to the previous paragraph, the lesser scholar Ben Zoma had something valuable to teach the greatest Sages of his generation. Learning moves in both directions, and everyone has something important to contribute to the conversation.

Yakhol MeRosh Chodesh: The Haggadah stresses the value of combining education and experience. “The commandment [to discuss the exodus from Egypt] applies specifically to the time when *matzah* and *maror* are set before you.”

B. THE JOURNEY RESUMES

Now that we have established a proper educational framework, we return to our journey. At the last checkpoint, we were slaves pointing to our bread of affliction, longing for redemption. Each passage in the next

⁵ Unlike most other rabbinic passages in the Haggadah which are excerpted from the Talmud and midrashic collections, this paragraph is unattested in rabbinic literature outside the Haggadah. See Joseph Tabory, *JPS Commentary on the Haggadah*, p. 38, for discussion of a parallel in the Tosefta.

section of the Haggadah moves us further ahead in the journey.

MiTechillah 'Ovedei 'Avodah Zarah: We quote from the Book of Joshua:

In olden times, your forefathers—Terach, father of Abraham and father of Nachor—lived beyond the Euphrates and worshiped other gods. But I took your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through the whole land of Canaan and multiplied his offspring. I gave him Isaac, and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession, while Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. (*Yehoshua* 24:2–4)

To experience the full redemption, *halakhah* requires us to begin the narrative with negative elements and then move to the redemption (see *Pesachim* 116a). However, the Haggadah surprisingly cuts the story line of this narrative in the middle of the Passover story. The very next verses read:

Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with [the wonders] that I wrought in their midst, after which I freed you—I freed your fathers—from Egypt, and you came to the Sea. But the Egyptians pursued your fathers to the Sea of Reeds with chariots and horsemen. They cried out to the Lord, and He put darkness between you and the Egyptians; then He brought the Sea upon them, and it covered them. Your own eyes saw what I did to the Egyptians. (*Yehoshua* 24:5–7)

Given the direct relevance of these verses to the Passover story, why are they not included in the Haggadah? It appears that the Haggadah does not cite these verses

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because we are not yet up to that stage in our journey. The Haggadah thus far has brought us only to Egypt.

VeHi She'Amedah: The Haggadah again affirms the connection between our ancestors and our contemporary lives. “This promise has held true for our ancestors and for us. Not only one enemy has risen against us; but in every generation enemies rise against us to destroy us. And the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand.” The slavery and exodus are a paradigm for all later history.

Tzei U'Imad: The midrashic expansion is based on *Devarim 26*, the confession that a farmer would make upon bringing his first fruits:

My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. The Lord freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and omens. (*Devarim 26:5–8*)

We continue our journey from our arrival in Egypt, where the passage in *Yehoshua* had left off. Through a midrashic discussion of the biblical verses, we move from Jacob's descent into Egypt, to the growth of the family into a nation, to the slavery, and then on through the plagues and exodus. By the end of this passage we have been redeemed from Egypt.

Like the passage from Joshua 24, the Haggadah once again cuts off this biblical passage before the end of its story. The next verse reads:

He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (*Devarim* 26:9)

In Temple times, Jews evidently did read that next verse (see Mishnah *Pesachim* 10:4).⁶ However, the conceptual value of stopping the story is consistent with our experience in the Haggadah. This biblical passage as employed by the Haggadah takes us through our ancestors' exodus from Egypt, so we have not yet arrived in the land of Israel.

Rabbi Yosei HaGelili Omer—Dayyenu: After enumerating the plagues, the Haggadah quotes from *Midrash Tehillim* 78, where Sages successively suggest that there were 50, 200, or even 250 plagues at the Red Sea. *Tehillim* 78 is concerned primarily with God's benevolent acts toward Israel, coupled with Israel's ingratitude. *Tehillim* 78 attempts to inspire later generations not to emulate their ancestors with this ingratitude:

He established a decree in Jacob, ordained a teaching in Israel, charging our fathers to make them known to their children, that a future generation might know—children yet to be born—and in turn tell their children that they might put their confidence in God, and not forget God's great deeds, but observe His commandments, and not be like their fathers, a wayward and defiant generation, a generation whose heart

⁶Cf. Joseph Tabory, JPS Commentary on the Haggadah, p. 33.

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was inconstant, whose spirit was not true to God. (*Tehillim* 78:5–8)

Several *midrashim* on this Psalm magnify God’s miracles even more than in the accounts in Tanakh, including the passage incorporated in the Haggadah that multiplies the plagues at the Red Sea. From this vantage point, our ancestors were even more ungrateful to God. The Haggadah then follows this excerpt with *Dayyenu* to express gratitude over every step of the exodus process. The juxtaposition of these passages conveys the lesson that the psalmist and the midrashic expansions wanted us to learn.

In addition to expressing proper gratitude for God’s goodness, *Dayyenu* carries our journey forward. It picks up with the plagues and exodus—precisely where the passage we read from Deuteronomy 26 had left off. It then takes us ahead to the reception of the Torah at Sinai, to the land of Israel, and finally to the Temple: “He gave us the Torah, He led us into the land of Israel, and He built for us the chosen Temple to atone for our sins.”

Rabban Gamliel Hayah Omer: Now that we are in the land of Israel and standing at the Temple, we can observe the laws of Passover! We describe the Passover offering during Temple times, *matzah* and *maror*, and their significance. It also is noteworthy that the reason given for eating *matzah* is freedom—unlike the slavery section earlier that focused on bread of affliction (*yachatz-ha lachma ‘anya*). “This matzah which we eat is...because the dough of our ancestors did not have time to leaven before the Holy One blessed be He...redeemed them suddenly.”

BeKhol Dor VaDor—Hallel: The primary purpose of the Haggadah is completely spelled out by now. “In each generation a person is obligated to see himself as though he went out of Egypt....For not only did the Holy One blessed be He redeem our ancestors, but He also redeemed us along with them....” Since we have been redeemed along with our ancestors, we recite the first two chapters of the *Hallel* (*Tehillim* 113–114).

These Psalms likewise take us from the exodus to entry into Israel. R. Judah Loew of Prague (Maharal, c. 1520–1609) explains that we save the other half of *Hallel* (*Tehillim* 115–118) for after the Grace after Meals, when we pray for our own redemption. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik adds that *Tehillim* 113–114 consist of pure praise, befitting an account of the exodus from Egypt which already has occurred. *Tehillim* 115–118 contain both praise and petition, relevant to our future redemption, for which we long.⁷

Asher Ge`alanu: Now that we have completed our journey and have chanted the *Hallel* thanking God for redeeming us, we conclude *maggid* with a blessing: “You are blessed, Lord our God...Who has redeemed us and redeemed our ancestors from Egypt and has brought us to this night to eat *matzah* and *maror*.” For the first time in the Haggadah, we place ourselves before our ancestors, since our experience has become primary. As we express gratitude to God for bringing us to this point and for giving

⁷ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom: Essays on Passover and the Haggadah*, ed. Joel B. Wolowelsky and Reuven Ziegler (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2006), p. 105.

us the commandments, we also petition for the rebuilding of the Temple and ultimate redemption.

IV. The Remainder of the Seder: Celebratory Observance in Freedom and Yearning for the Messianic Redemption

At this point we observe the laws of Passover. Although there is no Passover offering, we eat the matzah and maror and then the festive meal (*shulchan orekh*). Our eating of the *korekh*, Hillel's wrap of *matzah*, *maror*, and *charoset* together reenacts a Temple observance (*Pesachim* 115a). Similarly, we use the final piece of *matzah* (“*tzafun*”) to symbolize the Passover offering, the last taste we should have in our mouths (*Pesachim* 119b).⁸ By consuming the second half of the matzah from *yahatz*, we take from the slavery matzah and transform its other half into a symbol of freedom.

After the Grace after Meals (*barekh*), we pray for salvation from our enemies and for the messianic era. By reading the verses “*shfokh hamatekha*—pour out Your wrath” (*Tehillim* 79:6–7), we express the truism that we

⁸ The word “*afikoman*” derives from the Greek, referring to anything done at the end of a meal, such as eating dessert or playing music or revelry. This was a common after-dinner feature at Greco-Roman meals (cf. J.T. *Pesachim* 37d). The Sages of the Talmud understood that people needed to retain the taste of the Passover offering in their mouths. It was only in the thirteenth century that the *matzah* we eat at the end of the meal was called the *afikoman* (Joseph Tabory, JPS Commentary on the Haggadah, p. 15).

cannot fully praise God in Hallel until we sigh from enemy oppression and recognize contemporary suffering.⁹

Many communities customarily open the door at this point for Elijah the Prophet, also expressing hope for redemption. We then recite the remainder of the Hallel which focuses on our redemption, as discussed above. Some of the later songs added to *nirtzah* likewise express these themes of festive singing and redemption.

V. Conclusion

The Haggadah is a composite text that expanded and evolved over the centuries. The symbols, along with traditional explanations for their meanings, similarly developed over time. Our Haggadah—with its core over 1,000 years old—takes us on a remarkable journey that combines narrative and observance into an intellectual and experiential event for people of all ages and backgrounds. In this manner, we travel alongside our ancestors from freedom to slavery to redemption. We are left with a conscious recognition that although we are free and we bless God for that fact, we long for the Temple in Jerusalem.

Leshanah haba`ah beYerushalayim, Amen.

⁹ Shemuel and Ze'ev Safrai enumerate longer lists of related verses that some medieval communities added (*Haggadat Hazal*, pp. 174–175).

Did the Jews Merit to Leave Egypt?

Rabbi Mosheh Aziz

We know that our forefathers - *Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*, as well as their children, were all faithful servants of God Almighty. Even *Yosef*, who spent many years alone in Egypt from a young age, managed to not fall into the darkness of paganism. However, by the end of 210 years in Egypt, it is clear that their descendants, our Jewish ancestors, had assimilated into the Egyptian culture and were worshipping idols just like the Egyptians. The questions therefore begs itself: if our Jewish ancestors had truly abandoned the ways of God Almighty in favor of pagan practices and Egyptian culture, then in what merit did they deserve to be freed from Egypt?

I. Jewish Religious Life in Egypt

The Torah gives us little information about the religious beliefs and conduct of the Jews during their sojourn in Egypt. Chapter 4 of *Shemot* seems to paint a positive portrait of our ancestors in Egypt. Even though *Moshe Rabbeinu* doesn't believe that the Jewish people will believe that he was sent by God Almighty to free them,¹ the Jewish people do, in fact, believe Moshe's message and that it was from God:

כט וַיִּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה, וְאַהֲרֹן; וַיֹּאסְפוּ, אֶת-כָּל-זִקְנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. ל' וַיְדַבֵּר אַהֲרֹן--
אֶת כָּל-הַדְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה; וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֱתָת, לְעֵינֵי הָעָם. לא
וַיֹּאמְרוּ, הָעָם; וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי-פָקַד יְהוָה אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכִי רָאָה אֶת-עֲנָנִים,
וַיִּקְדּוּ, וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ.

¹ *Shemot* 4:1

29 And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel. **30** And Aaron spoke all the words which God had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people. **31** And the people believed; and when they heard that God had remembered the children of Israel, and that He had seen their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshipped.²

Nonetheless, this “great belief” the Jews appeared to have in God was short-lived. *Moshe Rabbeinu* goes on to deliver God’s message to Pharaoh. Pharaoh not only denies God’s message and request, he accuses the Jews of being lazy, and immediately orders that the labor of the Jewish slave should be increased. And then look what happens: as soon as Pharaoh makes the work more difficult, the Jewish people quickly abandon their old belief in God and *Moshe*, and are no longer willing to listen to *Moshe*:

וּלְכֹן אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי יְהוָה, וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבֻלֹת מִצְרַיִם, וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתָם; וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָהּ, וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים. ז וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם, וְהִיִּיתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים; וַיִּדְעָתֶם, כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, הִמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם, מִתַּחַת סְבֻלֹת מִצְרַיִם. ח וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם, אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת-יָדִי, לְתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב; וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לְכֶם מוֹרְשָׁה, אֲנִי יְהוָה ט וַיִּדְבַּר מֹשֶׁה כּו, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ, אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, מִקִּצֵּר רוּחַ, וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה.

6 Wherefore say unto the children of Israel: I am God, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments; **7** and I will take you to Me for a people, and I

² *Shemot* 4:29-31. Translations of the Torah adapted from JPS 1917, www.mechon-mamre.org

will be to you a God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning which I lifted up My hand to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for a heritage: I am God.' 9 And Moshe spoke so unto the children of Israel; but did not listen to Moshe, for impatience of spirit, and for cruel bondage³.

By the time *Moshe* goes to Pharaoh to inform him about the plague of blood, the Jewish nation has already lost faith and do not want to hear from *Moshe* anymore.⁴ The fact that the Jews gave up on *Moshe* so quickly is indicative of how shaky and shallow their “belief” in God was.

In fact, the prophet *Yechezkel* gives a striking and harsh criticism that sheds light on the state of the Jewish in Egypt:

ב וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר. ג בֶּן אָדָם דַּבֵּר אֶת זִמְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה הִלְדָּרְשׁ אֶתִּי אַתֶּם בָּאִים חַי אֲנִי אִם אֲדַרְשׁ לָכֶם נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה. ד הִתְשַׁפֵּט אַתֶּם הִתְשַׁפּוּט בֶּן אָדָם אֶת תּוֹעֵבַת אַבּוֹתֵיכֶם הוֹדִיעֶם. ה וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה בְּיוֹם בְּחָרֵי בְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָשָׂא יָדַי לַזֶּרַע בֵּית יַעֲקֹב וְאָנֹדַע לָהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְאָשָׂא יָדַי לָהֶם לֵאמֹר אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. ו בְּיוֹם הַהוּא נִשְׂאֵתִי יָדַי לָהֶם לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֶל אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְתִּי לָהֶם זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבַשׁ צָבִי הִיא לְכֹל הָאֲרָצוֹת. ז וְאָמַר אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ שְׁקוּצֵי עֵינָיו הִשְׁלִיכוּ וּבְגָלוֹלֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶל תִּטְמְאוּ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. ח וַיִּמְרוּ בִי וְלֹא אָבוּ לְשִׁמְעַע אֵלַי אִישׁ אֶת שְׁקוּצֵי עֵינֵיהֶם לֹא הִשְׁלִיכוּ וְאֵת גְּלוּלֵי מִצְרַיִם לֹא עָזְבוּ וְאָמַר לְשִׁפְףָה חֲמָתִי עֲלֵיהֶם לְכַלּוֹת אֶפְי בָהֶם בְּתוֹךְ אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם. ט

³ *Shemot* 6:6-9

⁴ One might even argue that the Jewish people did not regain this trust until after they crossed *yam suf* (the Red Sea) and saw their taskmasters lying dead on the banks of the sea. See *Shemot* 14:30-31.

וַאֲעֵשׂ לְמַעַן שְׁמִי לְבַלְתִּי הַחֵל לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר הִמָּה בְּתוֹכָם אֲשֶׁר נִדְעָתִי
אֲלֵיהֶם לְעֵינֵיהֶם לְהוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם. י וַאֲוֹצִיאֵם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם וְאָבֵאֵם
אֶל הַמִּדְבָּר.

2 And the word of God came unto me, saying: 3 'Son of man, speak unto the elders of Israel...4 ...cause them to know the abominations of their fathers; 5 and say unto them: Thus says the Lord GOD: In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up My hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up My hand unto them, saying: I am the Lord your God; 6 in that day I lifted up My hand unto them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had sought out for them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the beauty of all lands; 7 and I said unto them: Cast away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. 8 But they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken unto Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt. 9 But I wrought for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known unto them, so as to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt. 10 So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness.⁵

First, *Yechezkel* tells us that the Jews extensively worshipped idols in Egypt. Even more poignantly, *Yechezkel* describes how when Hashem appeared to deliver

⁵ *Yechezkel* 20:2-10

the Israelites from slavery, they refused to cast aside their idols, causing Hashem to consider wiping out the entire nation.⁶ Maimonides understood the harsh criticism of *Yechezkel* towards the Jewish people in Egypt as being literal. As he notes in the first chapter *Hilkhot Avoda Zara*, only the tribe of Levi did not engage in the rampant idol worship:

וְהָיָה הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וּמִתְגַּבֵּר בְּבְנֵי יַעֲקֹב וּבְנִלְוִיִּם עֲלֵיהֶם, וְנַעֲשֶׂת פְּעוּלָם אִמָּה
שֶׁהִיא יוֹדַעַת אֵת ה', עַד שֶׁאָרְכוּ הַיָּמִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְחִזְרוּ לְלַמֵּד
מִעֲשֵׂיהֶם וְלַעֲבֹד עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה כְּמוֹתוֹ--חוּץ מִשִּׁבְט לֵוִי, שֶׁעָמַד בְּמִצְוֹת אֲבוֹת;
וּמִעוּלָם, לֹא עָבַד שִׁבְט לֵוִי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה. וְכַמְעַט קָט הָיָה, וְהֵעִיקָר שֶׁשָּׂתַל
אֲבָרָהֶם נֶעְקָר; וְחוּרֵיֶן בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב לְטַעוֹת הָעַמִּים, וְתַעֲיָתָם

*This precept (God's existence and His worship) proceeded and gathered strength among the descendants of Jacob and those who collected around them, until there became a nation within the world which knew God. **When the Jews extended their stay in Egypt, however, they learned from the Egyptians' deeds and began worshiping the stars as they did, with the exception of the tribe of Levi, who clung to the mitzvot of the patriarchs - the tribe of Levi never served false gods. It came very close to the fundamental principle that Abraham had planted having been uprooted, and the descendants of Jacob would have***

⁶ See Rabbi Menachem Leibtag's article "Preparing for Redemption," accessible at <http://www.tanach.org/shmot/vaeyra/vaeyras1.htm>, where he demonstrates the connection between God's command at the beginning of *parashat va'era*, the Jews' refusal to listen to Moshe in *Shemot* 6:9, and *Yechezkel*'s scathing prophecy against the Jewish people.

*returned to the errors of the world and their crookedness [and become just like the other nations].*⁷

Based on the above, the question must be asked - if the Jewish people were truly such assimilated idol-worshippers in the land of Egypt, in what merit were they able to leave Egypt? We will offer several approaches to answer this difficulty. Of course, since we are dealing with the realm of *derasha*(homiletics) and not the realm of *halakha*(law), there does not necessarily need to be only one right answer: none of these interpretations necessarily exclude each other, and they may all be valid to some degree.

II. Approach #1

One way of looking at the issue we are discussing is to say that in fact, the Jews did not deserve to be freed from the land of Egypt. The only reason God took them out was because of His promises to our forefathers that He would free the Jewish people from the slavery, judge the nation that enslaves them, and lead the Jewish people to the land of Israel.⁸ We find some evidence for this theory in other passages in the Torah. For example in *parashatekev*, we read:

ז לא מִרְבֵּכֶם מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים, חֲשַׁק יְהוָה בְּכֶם--וַיִּבְחַר בְּכֶם: כִּי-אַתֶּם הַמְעֻטִּים,
מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים. ח כִּי מֵאַהֲבַת יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם, וּמִשְׁמֵרוֹ אֶת-הַשְּׁבִעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע
לְאַבְרָהָם, הוֹצֵיא יְהוָה אֶתְכֶם, בְּיַד חֲזָקָה; וַיִּפְדֶּךָ מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים, מִיַּד פְּרֹעָה
מִלֶּךְ-מִצְרַיִם.

⁷ MT *Hilkhot Avoda Zara* 1:3 Translations of Maimonides' Mishne Torah adapted from www.chabad.org.

⁸ See for example, *Bereshit* 15:13-16, the promise to Avraham Avinu in *berit ben habetarim*.

7 God did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people--for you were the fewest of all peoples-- **8** but because God loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore unto your fathers, did God brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeem you out of the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.⁹

Maimonides echoes this notion at the end of the passage quoted above, that God only redeemed the Jewish people from Egypt out of his great love for us, and in order to fulfill his promise to *Avraham Avinu*:

וּמֵאַהֲבַת ה' אֹתָנוּ, וּמִשְׁמֵרוֹ אֶת הַשְּׁבוּעָה לְאַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ, עָשָׂה מִשָּׁה רַבָּנוּ
וְרַבֵּן שְׁלֵכֵל הַנְּבִיאִים, וְשִׁלְחוֹ.

And because of God's love for us, and to uphold the oath He made to Abraham, our patriarch, He brought forth Moses, our teacher, the master of all prophets, and sent him [to redeem the Jews].

According to these sources, we would posit that the Jewish people did not deserve to leave Egypt or become the Chosen Nation. It was only because of God's love for the Jewish people, and in order to keep his promise to our forefathers that we were able to be freed from slavery.¹⁰

⁹ *Devarim* 7:7-8

¹⁰ See the end of the prophecy of *Yechezkel* quoted above more closely for another twist on the notion that the Jewish people did not deserve to be saved from Egypt, and God only did so for His own purposes.

III. Approach #2

Another way that we can tackle this issue is to look more closely at the 10 plagues in Egypt. Even though the Jewish people assimilated and became idol-worshippers while they were in Egypt, the 10 plagues that God Almighty brought upon Egypt served to eradicate the Jewish people's belief¹¹ that the Egyptian gods had any power. Before the tenth and final plague, we read:

וְעָבַרְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה וְהַפִּיתִי כָּל בְּכוֹר בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מֵאָדָם
וְעַד בְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל אֱלֹהֵי מִצְרַיִם אֶעֱשֶׂה שְׁפָטִים אֲנִי ה'.

*For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am God.*¹²

The Torah here tells us that the Plague of the Firstborn executed a judgment against the Egyptian gods. However, this may be true of the other plagues as well. Various *midrashim* already note that the Nile was worshiped in Egypt, and that the first plague of דָּם, turning the Nile into blood, was directed against the belief in this god:

למה לקו המים תחלה בדם מפני שפרעה והמצריים עובדים ליאור, אמר
הקדוש ברוך הוא אכה אלוה תחלה.

¹¹ Or for that matter, maybe even the Egyptians' belief

¹² *Shemot* 12:11

*Why were the waters stricken first by blood? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians served the Nile. God Almighty therefore said: "I will smite the god first."*¹³

Modern scholars and Egyptologists¹⁴ have extended this theory. For example, to make the Midrash's note above more concrete, scholars note that the Plague of דם, blood, was directed against *Khnum*, one of the earliest Egyptian deities, originally the god of the source of the Nile River (see Appendix #1), and/or against *Hapi*, the god of the annual flooding of the Nile. The Plague of צפרדע, frogs, was intended to mock *Heqet*, the Egyptian goddess of childbirth who was depicted as a frog. Interestingly, *Heqet* was also the wife of *Khnum* (see Appendix #1). Thus, the first two plagues may have been intended against two Egyptian gods who were married.

The fifth plague of דבר, pestilence inflicting the cattle, might have been directed against *Hathor*, represented in the form of a cow; or against *Apis*, symbol of fertility represented as a bull (see Appendix #2).

The seventh and eighth plagues of ברד, hail, and ארבה, locust, seem to have been directed against *Min*, who was the Egyptian god of fertility and vegetation. The Torah indicates¹⁵ that the plague of hail came at the time that the flax and barley were about to be harvested, but before the

¹³ *Shemot Rabba* 9:9. Translation is the author's.

¹⁴ Our sources for facts about Egyptian gods are: Z. Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues: Were They Natural Disasters, a Demonstration of the Impotence of the Egyptian Gods, or an Undoing of Creation?" *Bible Review* 6 (1990): 16-23, 42, and Avraham Shalom Yahuda's wonderful book, *Accuracy of the Bible* (1935).

¹⁵ *Shemot* 9:31-32

wheat and spelt had matured. This information is significant, because the Egyptians widely celebrated the “Coming out of *Min*” in Egypt at the beginning of the harvest. These two plagues, therefore, which completely destroyed the harvest, also ruined the Egyptians' annual party plans for *Min*.

The plague of darkness, according to this line of thinking, was directed at one of the most famous Egyptian gods, *Ra*, who was the god of the sun (see Appendix #3). The next and final plague, the death of the firstborn, was directly related to the previous plague against *Ra*. As modern scholarship shows, the firstborn of Pharaoh, who was the crown prince, had divine rank. From the moment he succeeded the throne as Pharaoh, he was crowned by the Egyptian gods as “*Sa-Ra-en-ICHetef*,” or “the son of Ra from his body,” and became a god himself. This final plague was essentially directed against the firstborn of the king, not so much to deprive Pharaoh of his successor, but to defy the mighty gods of Egypt, and to show their impotence to protect the offspring of the “son of *Ra*.”

Based on the above evidence, we see that the plagues that God brought upon Egypt served to eliminate any possible belief in the Egyptian pantheon. Even if the Jews did believe in and serve these idols in Egypt, these ten plagues stamped out any possible belief in foreign gods and redirected the Jews towards God Almighty. The proof of fact to this is the feast of the *korban pesach* that the Jews ate on the night before they left Egypt. The lamb which was used for *korban pesach* had to be publicly tied down, slaughtered, roasted, and then finally eaten by every Jew before they left Egypt. We know full well that this entire

ceremony and process of eating the *korban pesach* was a powerful psychological mechanism for the Jews to openly repudiate a god of the Egyptians and demonstrate complete faith in God Almighty, at the climax of the lunar month whose astrological symbol was *Aries* (a ram). Accordingly, we might say that *Yechezkel's* harsh description of the Jews refusing to give up idol worship was only referring to before the plagues. After the plagues and *korban pesach*, however, the Jewish people, having fully rejected idolatry, regained full confidence in God Almighty.¹⁶

IV. Approach #3

One of the greatest overlooked miracles in the Jews' leaving Egypt was the very fact that the Jewish people kept their identity throughout the entire stay in Egypt. Identity is normally¹⁷ very closely tied with the geographical location where you are living. Therefore, when living in a foreign land for a long time period of time, assimilation usually entails a complete forfeit of identity to the country you are living in. After a certain time period, the original identity becomes lost and the new identity of the current culture is accepted. While in Egypt, the Jews must have had some way of holding on to their identity, even though they seemed to be assimilated and were worshipping the Egyptian gods. As we read in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*:

וַיְהִי שֵׁם לְגוֹי - מִלְמַד שֶׁהָיוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְצַיְנִים שָׁם.

¹⁶ For a fuller treatment of how the original *korban pesach* ceremony served as an open rejection of idolatry, see Rabbi Dr. Moshe Sokolow's article, "The *Korban Pesach* and the Repudiation of *Avodah Zarah*," printed in *Pesach Reader* (2010) published by Tebah Publishing

¹⁷ By "normally," I mean that the Jewish people throughout history may be the only known exception to this rule

“And there he became a nation...” Teaches us that the Children of Israel were distinguishable there.

The Jews, even if they didn't worship God in all aspects, were well aware that they were Jews and not Egyptians. The million dollar question is, of course, how did our Jewish ancestors holding on to their identity for so many years in a foreign land?

The secret to unlocking this puzzle comes in the very first verse of *Shemot*:

אִנְּאֵלֶּה, שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַבָּאִים, מִצְרָיִם: אֵת יַעֲקֹב, אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ.

*1*Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, who came into Egypt with Jacob; every man came with his household.¹⁸

Here, the Torah describes that the sons of *Yaakov*, אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ: each one came with his own household, with his own family. The most important thing that the sons of *Yaakov* did when they came down to Egypt was to come down with their families, to put their families at the center! This point is significant in light of how God describes the land Egypt at the very beginning of the Theophany at Sinai:

בְּ אֲנֹכִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.

*2*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves.

¹⁸ *Shemot* 1:1

In a tyrannical society, every single person, from the lowliest servant up to the highest officer, including the king himself, is a slave. Therefore, the entire Egypt is considered by the Torah as a “house of slaves.” Now, *Yaakov* and his sons recognized this “house of slaves” for what it was *prior* to their arrival in Egypt. In order to counteract it, to keep their identity, and to recognize slavery for what it was, *Yaakov* and his children came down to Egypt as the “household of Jacob.” It is exclusively this family unit which allowed the Jewish people to remain a Jewish people, and not to become Egyptians themselves by the next generation.¹⁹

This may be perhaps why we see such a tremendous emphasis on the *bayit*(household) when God commands the Jews regarding the *pesach* offering before they leave Egypt. In fact, the word “*bayit*” appears no less than 11 times during that section of the Torah! One lamb was to be taken **for each *bayit***.²⁰ The Jews were to smear its blood on the doorpost **of the *bayit***.²¹ The Jews were to remove all types of *hametz*(leaven) **from the *bayit***.²² God would not let the angel of death come **to the *bayit***.²³ Because the *bayit* was at the heart of the Jewish people's ability to keep their identity intact in Egypt, it also became a central part of the Pesach.

Accordingly, we may suggest that even though the Jewish people were not righteous and worshipped idols in the land of Egypt, they merited to leave Egypt because of

¹⁹ For a fuller analysis, see Faur, J. *The Horizontal Society: Understanding the Covenant and Alphabetic Judaism* Volumes 1 & 2, pp 109-112 (2010). Academic Studies Press

²⁰ *Shemot* 12:3

²¹ *Shemot* 12:7, 12:13

²² *Shemot* 12:15, 12:19

²³ *Shemot* 12:23

how they held on to their family and Jewish identity. It is interesting to note that one of the most famous pieces of *Midrash Tanchuma* corroborates this view:

בזכות כמה דברים נגאלו ישראל ממצרים? כך שנו רבותינו בזכות ד' דברים שלא שנו את שמותם, ול"ש את לשונם, ולא גלו מסתרים שלהם, ולא נפרצו בעריות.

In the merit of how many things were the Jews redeemed from Egypt? Our Rabbis taught, in the merit of four things: they did not change their names [kept their Jewish names], they did not change their tongue [kept their original language], they did not disclose each others' secrets, and they did not breach barriers of sexual immorality [they did not intermarry, etc.]²⁴

Even though the Jewish people worshipped idols, the *midrashteaches* us that for the entire duration in Egypt, our ancestors kept the basic elements of their identity: they kept Jewish names, they continued to speak and use the holy tongue, there were no informers among them, and they did not intermarry or copy the Egyptians' illicit sexual ways. Because they kept to their families and held onto their identity in this way, the Jews merited for God to take them out of Egypt.

²⁴ *Midrash Tanchuma*, Balak #16. The midrash goes on to deduce all four of these from verses in the Torah, עיין שם.

V. Conclusion

We have seen that there are at least three possibilities for how the Jewish people were able to leave Egypt even though they seemingly did not deserve for God to take them out. The first approach based itself in God's promise to our forefathers to lead their descendants out of slavery and into the Holy Land. The second approach focused on the plagues and the *korban pesach*, and how they removed any possible notion of belief in idolatry. The third approach built around the prominence of the Jewish family, and how the preservation of the Jewish family allowed the Jews to keep their identity and survive in Egypt. As we said these approaches do not necessarily exclude each other in any way. In fact, all of these factors contribute their own elements (and lessons) to enrich our understanding of how the Jews left Egypt.²⁵

²⁵ And of course, because we are dealing with *derasha* and not *halakha*, we do not have to limit ourselves to these three approaches. Other approaches can be also valid and contribute to our understanding of our topics.

Thoughts on the Four Sons

Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim

I. Introduction

It is important to keep in mind that *yitziatmitzrayim* is the foundation of our faith. Nearly all of our commandments reference leaving Egypt, even Shabbat is described as “*zekherliyitziatmitzrayim*-in commemoration of the Exodus.” Perhaps more than 50% of the *mitzvot* are related in one way or another to leaving Egypt. We will then strive to understand the *haggadahto* the best of our abilities together.

II. The *Fifth* Son

Many ask why we read in the *Haggadah* of Pesach: “The Torah spoke of four sons, one wise (חכם), one wicked (רשע), one simpleminded (תם), and one who-does-not-know-how-to-ask (שאינו יודע לשאול).” It should have said: “One *wise*(חכם), one simpleminded (תם), one who-does-not-know-how-to-ask (שאינו יודע לשאול),and one *wicked*(רשע),” that would've have been a gradual progression from good to bad. Why does the text instead jump from the wise son to the wicked son and skip the other sons in between?

Golda Meir, a Prime Minister of Israel (1969-74), once said: “I don't care that people are not [religiously] observant in our land, but they should at least know our history!”

This can answer our question. The wicked son, at least, knows the history of our nation, and you can have a meaningful conversation with him about it.¹ Therefore, the wicked son is in some sense better than the son who-does-not-know-how-to-ask and the simpleminded sons who are ignorant of our history and traditions. He, the wicked son, has some hope of repenting due to the knowledge he has.

To take things a step further, the Lubavitcher Rebbe would say something very nice in relation to this. He would tell people that there are in fact *five* sons today, not four. The fifth son is the one who doesn't show up to the *seder* at all! Therefore, today we must go out to the fifth sons out there and bring them closer to Torah and teach them what Pesach is all about.

III. Why Questions?

Here, however, an interesting difficulty remains: why must all this information in the *Haggadah* be conveyed via questions? Instead of “מה נשתנה?”, why not say things in a straightforward manner, without the questions marks? The *halakha*, in fact, requires that one specifically ask questions. If there are children present, they ask questions, if no children are present one's wife should ask him questions, and if someone is alone, he should ask himself questions!²

¹ This is how some interpret the phrase: “הכה את שיניו,” which literally means to “hit his teeth,” but can be metaphorically be understood to imply arguing and debating with the wicked son.

² MT Laws of *Hametz & Matzah* 7:3

So, why the need for the question-and-answer format? The truth is that our Rabbis were wise people who knew that it is not always easy to teach a student. If one were to lecture to a child, without any type of interaction on the part of the student, it is possible that the information goes in one ear and out the other, so to speak. However, when the child becomes a partner in the learning process, by asking questions and making comments, you have automatically enabled him to internalize the learning.

Therefore, the children must be engaged in the conversation from the very beginning. By allowing the children to be involved, one kindles inside him a thirst for learning. Because of this, in my house we have the practice of taking turns reading different parts of the *Haggadah*, and afterwards we discuss it together. Each person, young and old, reads the same amount as the next. This way we ensure that the little ones are involved just as much as the adults.

IV. The Wise Son's Question

Many have pointed out that what wise son says and what the wicked son say seem rather similar at first glance. The wicked son says: “מה העבודה הזאת לכם?”—*What is this worship for you?*³” (And by saying “you” he excludes himself from the rest of the nation.) But the wise also makes use of the word “you” when he says, “מה העדות והחקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה' אלקינו אתכם—*What are these testimonies, ordinances, and laws that God our Lord has commanded you.*”⁴ Why is it that towards the wicked son we take a negative stance and for the wise son we do not?

There is, in truth, a world of difference between these two questions. The wicked son is speaking of the sacrificial worship (= “העבודה הזאת”) which was conducted at that time. He wants to know why we are going through so much trouble to bring *korbanot* (animal offerings); isn't there a more convenient way of going about things, he asks. In putting forward this question, the wicked son is showing that he does not place value in the *mitzvot* of the Torah.

To draw a contemporary example, when someone says, “Why do you have to spend hundreds of dollars for a pair of *tefillin* approved by the rabbi? You can buy one for \$50 which look exactly the same!”, he shows that he does not actually care for the laws that God has put into place for us. On the contrary, a Jew should always look to perform the *mitzvot* in the best possible way. By, for example, buying the most beautiful *mezuzah* or *tefillin* he can afford.

³ *Shemot* 12:26

⁴ *Devarim* 6:20

The wise son, on the other hand, asks regarding the laws of the Torah. He really just wants to understand the *mitzvot* (=“עדות והחקים”) better. There is therefore a huge difference between the wicked son who complains and degrades the *mitzvot*, to the wise son who seeks to understand them to the best of his ability.

We should then pay attention to what the proper response to the wicked son is: “הכה את שיניו”—*engage him in discussion* (lit. “smash his teeth”).” The *haggadah*, then, instructs us to bring closer those who are far away from religion, since that is the only way we can stay united.

Who Knows 4?¹

Oren Bezalely

To the untrained eye, the *Haggadah* appears to be a collection of random songs and teachings loosely related to the redemption. In truth it is a cryptic compendium of riddles, poems, and puzzles. Together with the rituals of the night it is designed as an educational tool to pass on the heritage of Judaism to our children.

Hurrying through the stages, *kadesh*, *urchatz*, *karpas*, *yachatz*, etc. in our half-drunken state, we are inclined to overlook the depth of the *Haggadah*: “*Chad Gadya*—One Kid,” “*Ma NishTanah*—The Four Questions,” dipping, leaning, the four cups of wine (strategically placed at four crucial points of the *Seder*), the sludgy brown apple flavored *charoset*, the four sons. One question we should be asking ourselves is *what’s with all the fours?*

The night is described in the Zohar as “*layla dehaymanuta*—the night of faith.” All the detailed ceremonies of the *Seder* are designed to fuel ourselves in our faith for the year to come; in particular, to feed the soul of our children with fundamental beliefs and to live their lives in accordance with our rich heritage, and to inaugurate them into our special relationship with our Creator. Indeed the main fuel of the *Seder*, the *matzah*, does this very thing. *Matzah*, “*michla dehaymanuta*—the food of *emunah* (faith),” is deeply symbolic in our origins as a people, and the theme of Pesach. The miracles and wonders which were poured into the world during the Exodus are focused into

¹ This piece was inspired by the writings of Rabbi Avi Shafran

the spirit of the night, and each year we stop at this fuelling point and fill up for the coming year.

These processes are so crucial to the Jewish soul that Jews of all backgrounds and all levels of observance feel compelled to partake in some sort of *Seder*.

As a punishment for his complaining on his commitment towards the Jewish people, Elijah the Prophet himself is forced to come and witness the overwhelming Jewish participation in the *mitzvot* of Pesach.²

This main pillar of faith is present in the *benot yisrael*, the Jewish women. They possess an element of faith which supersedes logic that men cannot grasp. During our time in Egypt, the Jewish men, broken by the hard labor and discouraged by the future of their people, decided to separate themselves from their wives. After all, what point would there be in producing children who would be killed or condemned to a life of crushing labor?

The wives knew better. They believed that the Jews were to be redeemed and were destined for a greater purpose, which would require them to leave Egypt with an army of children. With this in mind, they went out to their husbands in the fields and seduced them under the modest shelter of the apple trees. “*Tachat hatapuach orartiycha*—under the apple tree I aroused you”, a beautiful reference to these holy events in *ShirHaShirim*.

² [i.e., when we use the Cup of Elijah (“*kos shel eliyahu*”), AKA the fifth cup, on the Seder night.]

The Pesach Companion

This is one of the reasons the Talmud teaches that we eat the *charoset*: “*zecher latapuach*—to remember the apple tree”. Apple, the main ingredient of the *charoset* reminds us of the value of our wives, our mothers, our sisters, and our daughters.

On another occasion *Amram* himself, the leader of the generation, and the future father of Moses, separated himself from his wife following the decree of death of all male born Hebrews. The Talmud testifies that it was his daughter Miriam, only a young girl at the time, who argued against his logic and caused him to retract his position. It was through Miriam’s wisdom that Moses was conceived.

It is the women who have portrayed such a strong discipline of faith, in such crucial times of our history and Jewish destiny.

Maybe this recurrent mysterious ‘4’ coded in the *Hagaddah* alludes to this very theme. During the *nirtza* stage of the *Seder*, we sing our Jewish number association song (“*echad mi yodeah?*—who knows one?”), the number-decoder at the back of the *Haggadah*.

Well...? Who knows four? Do you know four? If you don’t, then use the decoder!

When Do We Eat?

Yaakob Bitton

*Dedicated to the memory of my grandfather,
Yaakob ben Yehuda Z"l*

Do you know how long it takes kids to lose focus? Research from 2009 shows that attention spans (“focused attention”) today may be as short as eight seconds. Things can “grab” our attention for up to eight seconds at a time, but then these things need to grab our attention again, because otherwise we lose focus. Things need to become “interesting” at least once every eight seconds. Also, something can be “interesting” if it is something we are curious about. We are curious about answers to questions we have. It is as if curiosity keeps bothering us every eight seconds or less until we have the answer we seek. Video games, modern pop music, and TV, all introduce something “new,” something “interesting” or something “loud” at least every eight seconds. This is why we are able to be engaged by these things for long spans of time.

It is because of this that reading the *Haggada* feels so boring. Often, the eldest person at the table just reads the Hebrew text out loud and the children are taken somewhere else far from the table so they don’t bother. This is definitely not the ideal *Haggada* experience! The *Haggada* is first and foremost for the children, after it’s been demanded by the children and with things of relevance to the children. Wouldn’t it be great if we led our children to ask for the information we want to transmit to them? Until they get their answer (this is not every eight seconds, this is constantly), they are engaged by this thirst called curiosity!

You know why children don't just sit nicely and listen quietly to grandpa read the ancient Hebrew (and Aramaic) when they didn't really ask him to? Because most children can't help but tune it out, and cannot stay focused on something that does not "grab" their attention every eight seconds or less.

The *Haggada*, the Seder and this experience around the Pesach table, are fundamental for our survival as Jews. The bad news is that we are failing our children in our *Haggada*; the good news is that the instructions are all already there—timeless instructions—to make the *Haggada* an experience as engaging as the latest blockbuster movie. The secret, as we will explain below, is that the *Haggada* was never meant to be read (only).

The *Haggada* was designed to be a family activity: highly engaging and participative, interesting and fun. It is an adventure, a journey to a fascinating and relevant story that starts with the children's questions and then explains to them who we are and why we want them to continue being it. The *Haggada* as we have it printed in most editions is actually an outline, a set of instructions, helping us to structure this adventure with our children and family.

The Mitzva of the Haggada

Many *mitzvot* are very broad in theory but are applied very specifically. For example, the *mitzva* of "you shall love your neighbor as yourself"¹ is both (i) the general attitude we should have towards one another at every waking moment of our lives, but also (ii) includes more

¹ *Vayikra* 19:18

specific deeds like *bikkur cholim*(visiting the sick), *levayat orechim*(caring to guests), *hakhnasat kalla* (financially assisting a new bride), etc.²

The *Haggada* is actually one of the most important *mitzvot* we have. The *mitzva*, generally speaking, is educating the next generation, teaching them what Judaism is about and why it is worth preserving. This *mitzva*, perhaps, the most crucial factor for our survival as a nation thus far—in spite of persecutions, landlessness, and our geographical dispersion throughout the entire globe. As with “love your neighbor,” the precept of educating the next generation is a general principle—we should educate our children in a Jewish way. But it also has a specific application: telling the story of our people to our children during the first night of Pesach.

The Torah says:

וְהִגַּדְתָּ לְבִנְךָ בְּיוֹם הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּעֵבוֹר זֶה עָשָׂה ה' לִי בְצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרָיִם:

*And you shall tell your child, on that day, something to the effect of: 'It is for the sake of this that God did [what He did] with me when I left Egypt'*³

In Hebrew, there are two words one can use to describe the transmitting of a message: *lemor*(ל.מ.ר) and *lehaggid*(ל.ג.ג). *Lemor* could be translated, roughly, as “to say.” *Lehaggid* would mean something along the lines of “to tell.” These two terms are not used haphazardly in the Torah. They represent two very different ways of saying

² MT Hil. *Avel* 14:1

³ *Shemot* 13:8

something. *Lemor*, to “say,” is the way of saying something when the actual words are what matter, not the concept behind them: these, and only these, words are what the message is about.

A person wanting to transmit a message in a *lemorway* will have to repeat the message verbatim (word-by-word) as it was originally said. For example, the classic Talmudic expression of *amar Rav Yehuda amar Rav* (“Said Rav Yehuda, said Rav...”) should be read as: these are the exact words pronounced by Rav Yehuda, as he reproduced the exact words pronounced by Rav.

A message conveyed in a *maggidway*, however, is more about the concept than it is about the exact words. The *maggid*, the teller, is permitted to use his or her own words to transmit an idea. The words will vary from teller to teller and from audience to audience. As the word “*VeHiggada*” suggests, the kind of transmission the Torah demands when educating the next generation is the *maggidtype*, not the *lemortype*.

It follows, that the *mitzvah* of the Haggada, if we want to be precise, is to transmit to our children, in our own words and in a way that is best for them to understand, something that leaves them with the feeling of "Oh, wow! This is why God took me out of Egypt!"

The Haggada is not a text. It is a *mitzva*. At some point in the time of the Gemara, a certain formula became widespread. As we will show, it is OK to read this text, but the formula is meant to be a template/set of instructions. In order to truly fulfill the *mitzvah* (and in order to keep the

young ones of our generation engaged), we must go much beyond simply reading it. We have to go further back in time and look at the actual rules for how to “transmit” the story of *mitzrayim* (Egypt) on this night.

There are five main rules to how to “do” the Haggada (I won’t use the verb “read”): (1) knowing your audience, (2) say the negative, and then the positive, (3) interacting with the Torah, (4) using the right symbols, and (5) acting it out. However, even when following these guidelines, the possibilities are endless!

I. Know your Audience

The Mishna is very explicit: לפי דעתו של בן, אביו מלמדו—*according to the grasp of the son, the father instructs him*. The message needs to be adapted to the audience, not the audience to the message. One of the earlier passages in the Haggada aims to bring this very point home.

Because the *mitzvah* of the Haggada appears in the Torah in four different passages (and, more basically, because the Torah uses the word *VeHiggadta* and not *VeAmarta*), we are told that the Torah was alluding to four kinds of children. Without going into why four, or why these four, the main point for us is that the onus is on us to be able to find a way of educating our children—in their way—and not on our children to be educated by us—our way.

Takeaway for the Seder: Spend some time, beforehand, thinking about what is the best way of grabbing the attention of each of the children in question. What’s

interesting to them (not necessarily the same as what is interesting to me)? What kind of questions will evoke their curiosity? A good way is to think of Judaism as a product you are selling, and of your children as potential customers. What's my elevator pitch? How can I present it to them in the most attractive way? And then, prepare. Be as ready for the Seder as you would for the most important sales pitch of your life. This is nothing less important.

II. Say the Negative, then the Positive

The second rule we find in the Mishna is to always structure the story of *'Am Israel* by beginning with the negative and ending with the positive.

Our children need to know that the product we are offering (i.e., being Jewish) has lots of positives but also some negatives. The reason for the order is that last impressions last. Whatever it is that we say at first, it becomes a sort of a background for whatever we say next. What we say in the end is always the main point we want to convey, the punch line: although [negative stuff], in the end [positive stuff].

This is the way we speak, this is the way Jewish history always is, and this is the way we perceive reality as Jews: the negative is but a prelude to the positive. We are suffering, but Hashem will bring about better times. We are sick, but we will be cured. We are in *galut* (the Diaspora) but we will be redeemed. It is this hopeful tone, and actually this approach to life, that we will be teaching our children by the way we talk to them.

So, in the context of *yetziat mitzrayim*, what is the “negative” and what is the “positive”? Given that everything is related—really, from *Adam haRishon* (the first Man) and until today, it is all one long story—how far back in history should we start from?

This question was answered differently by two sages of the Gemara. The Talmud records a dispute between Rav and Shemuel about whether the story we must tell is the story of Slavery → Freedom, or the story of Pagans → People of God. The conclusion: we tell both. This is why the printed Haggada has the passage that begins with “*avadim hayinu*-we were slaves” as well as the passage of “*mitechilla, ovde avoda zara hayu avotenu*-in the beginning our forefathers worshipped idols”—one explains our circumstances (what happened to us) and the other explains our development (who we were and what we grew into).

Takeaway for the Seder: *In a way that the children can understand, parents should take a few minutes and explain as best as they can (and as entertainingly as possible): where we come from (paganism), what we became (the People of God), what circumstances befell us through history (anti-Semitism in all of its shapes and forms), and who has always saved us (God). Begin with the negative and end with the positive. Nobody begins perfectly: our grandparents worshiped idols. But everyone can improve; we then became a nation chosen by God Himself! Everyone has bad moments;: the Egyptians oppressed us. But, with*

the help of God, everyone can get out of any impossible situation; we were redeemed.

III. Interacting with the Torah

Before we proceed, know that the third principle of the Haggada is a bit more advanced. This principle says that we shouldn't just use words in a vacuum. You see, learning or teaching Torah is not about ideas. It is about texts. At Mt. Sinai, when we agreed to receive God's instructions, we weren't "taught" some concepts of what's good and what's bad. We were given a text. We were then entrusted with this text, to interact with it and create meaning. God is not the only author of the Torah. We are too! Every time someone reads a text, both the author and the reader are partnering-up in creating meaning out of the written words.

We want our children to understand this. We want to show them, hands-on, what it means to study Torah: to interact with the words God gave us at Mt. Sinai.

Because of this, the third principle of the Haggada is that we should look very closely at a special formula our ancestors would say when they brought the *bikkurim*. In Ancient Israel, we would offer in the Temple the first yield of our fruit trees: *bikkurim*. Upon tendering the fruit basket to the *kohen* (priest), we would recite a few verses (*Devarim* 20:5-11) that are a brief history of the People of Israel.

Those *pesukim* are themselves a Haggada. Granted, there could be other ways of telling our story, other *Haggadot*. In order to have this experience of interacting

with our Torah, however, we base any Haggada we may come to fashion on those verses themselves. The text of the *bikkurim*-recital should serve as the platform, the outline, for our own version of the story.

We now understand what the entire section of the Haggada beginning with “*Tze uLmad*” is about. It is a very dynamic reading of the *bikkurim* verses, showing how each word of that Haggada we used to say in the Temple encodes a reference to the story of *Mitzrayim* as narrated in *Shemot*.

Take away for the Seder: This part might be the least child-friendly of all. It is no less important, however. At the very least, children should be told about the bikkurim, and how we would bring the first fruits of our garden to God’s palace (= the Beit HaMikdash), and how we would then take the opportunity of thanking Him for taking us out of Egypt. That thankfulness is important even for things that happened a long time ago. And that we, too, should be thankful for yetziat mitzrayim, because otherwise we wouldn’t be here tonight.

For the more advanced participants in the Seder, this is an opportunity to interact with the text of the Torah in a very Jewish way. Try to understand this section; how are each of the words of the bikkurim Haggada really related to the story in Shemot? How is the principle of “negative → positive” being applied here?

IV. Using the Right Symbols

The Haggada needs to be told using one's hands. More precisely, using one's index finger. One should be able to point at something on the table and tell the child "It is for the sake of this [pointing at something] that God did what He did to me when I left Egypt." What is "this"? What should we be pointing at with our index finger? Ideally, the *korban pesach*—served over *matza* and *merorim* (bitter herbs).

Rabban Gamliel got to do some Haggadot in this ideal way before the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed. Now, as a tidbit, one of the rules of the *korban pesach* is that it must be eaten before midnight. As we all know, that's not quite enough time to get through the entire Seder! Rabban Gamliel then needed to identify the most minimum "Haggada" one would need to do, one that could be done before midnight and at the same time capture the essence of the lesson to be taught tonight. "Rabban Gamliel says: anyone failing to mention the following three things on Pesach would not fulfill his obligation [of the Haggada]: 'Pesach', '*matza*', and '*merorim*'."

Rather than thinking of this as three magic words one must utter, Rabban Gamliel may have been saying that there are three types of events in the story of *mitzrayim*. There are things that were done to us by the Egyptians (signified by the "word" *merorim*), there are things that were done to us by God (signified by the "word" Pesach), and things which we, the Children of Israel, can take credit for (signified by the *matza*). What Rabban Gamliel is telling us, and what this fourth principle of how to fulfill the

precept of the Haggada guides us to do, is to tell the story of *mitzrayim* by touching upon all three of these themes.

"**Pesach**", as explained by Targum Onkelos (Aramaic translation of the Torah), means "protection" (*chayis*—[He] had compassion over the Jewish homes). We have to tell our children about those things done to us by God: how He was behind the journey of Abraham to Canaan; of Yaakov's journey to and from *Charan*; how God orchestrated the series of events that began with Yaakov's love for Rachel, Yosef's brothers' jealousy, our subsequent migration to Egypt, and our enslavement there; and, of course, all that God did to rescue us, the things we learned about Him because of the supernatural plagues, how He took us to Sinai and contracted a covenant with us, how He then took us back to our forefather's promised land, etc.

"**Merorim**"—bitter herbs—signifies our affliction in the hands of the Egyptians. We also have to tell our children what the Egyptians did to us; it is very important that the next generation of our People understand that we are not the darlings of the world. We were hated and persecuted, are hated and persecuted, and likely may still be hated and persecuted in the future. Our children need to hear how we represent the one largest threat to dictators, and how they will use propaganda of all sorts to convince their people that all their suffering is not the tyrants' fault, but is due to the Israelites. How a nation saved from famine by Yosef turned against his descendants.

It is important as well that we transmit to our children the very fact that we have known suffering. We know what it is like to be oppressed; and, therefore, we should never

do the same to anybody else. As we suggested earlier, what the Egyptians did to us belongs to the “background story” to the main message of the night—the positive. The more we disclose regarding how we were treated (the ‘background’), the more everything else (the ‘punch-line’) will be relevant.

"**Matza**"—those things where we, the People of Israel, were the proactive protagonists. Ever since the times of Yosef (see *Shemot* 47:18-26), the entire population of Egypt was enslaved to Pharaoh. *Mitzrayim*, Egypt, was a “*beit ‘avadim*—a place of slaves.” The Israelites, for possibly ten generations, had known no other reality but slavery to a tyrant. Everybody around them was subjected to that same reality. Still, the very first event that started the story of *yetziat mitzrayim* was the time when the Israelites prayed to God “[to free them] from slavery.” (*Shemot* 2:23). Isn’t this the greatest of all miracles in the story of Pesach? Shouldn’t this be one of the highlights of what we tell our children about who we are and what we are made of? There is something about us; there was something about us even before being redeemed from Egypt.

And how exactly is this signified by *matza*? There are yet two other examples of our proactive role in the story of Pesach. Firstly, when asked by God to make a BBQ with our masters’ idolized animals’ meat (i.e., the Pesach lamb), we did it. Secondly, when asked by Moshe to leave our reality, our lives, our communities, everything we ever knew, and follow him to...well, to nowhere really at that point...we did it!

The courage this step required from us would still reverberate over fifteen hundred years later. The prophet Jeremiah reports God's message "...I recall for your sake your goodness in your youth, your love during your marriage [to me]—having followed me in a desert, through an infertile land" (*Yirmeyahu* 2:2). Instead of rejecting the departure from a reality we knew to follow God into the unknown, we did so immediately. In fact, we left with such eagerness that we did not even wait for our dough to rise and chose instead to bake our bread unleavened—*matza*!

Takeaway for the Seder: We should take advantage of the fact that the Haggada needs to be told using visual elements! Few things are more engaging than objects. We should describe the korban pesach, point out the lettuce and point out the matza, and then we should explain to our children why we have all three things. Some things were done to us by Egyptians, some things were done to us by God, and we, too, did our fair share in this story.

V. Acting it Out

The final instruction of the Haggada is that we actually act out the story, as if it had been we, ourselves, who left Egypt. We learn this from the fact that Moshe, talking to the generation after the one that had come out from Egypt, tells them that God redeemed them (even though this was not literally so) from Egypt: "And He took us out from there, in order to bring us [here] and give us the land which He pledged to our forefathers."

Our Rabbis recommend—or, more accurately, demand—that we behave in the same way we would had

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we, ourselves, left Egypt. After all, we are who we are, where we are, and what we are, as a consequence of that Redemption! This includes some specific traditions like eating reclined to the left side, having four cups of wine, and beginning our meal with the (once very expensive) fresh vegetable—*karpas*.

(However, it may involve other traditions too. Many Sephardic families have the custom of dressing up as nomads and literally act out the recently-freed Hebrew slaves leaving Egypt.)

This night is for our children. We encourage their questions by doing weird things; we care greatly about their not falling asleep; and we put tremendous effort in fashioning a Haggada they will be able to relate to. So why not make it fun too? Our children will remember very fondly how they used to act as freed Hebrew slaves. They will gain all the feel-good sensations they need in order to want to one day tell a Haggada to their children too.

We all are familiar with the notion of *achdut*—unity. However, many think that this unity is appropriate only to our fellow Jews in our generation. What about Jews from past generations? Yes. They too are part of *'Am Yisrael*. *Achdut* should be practiced horizontally (with the people alive today) as well as vertically (with the people alive in the past and those yet to live, in the future). This is a priceless message to transmit to our children. They need to learn to empathize with our grandfathers, our great-grandfathers and our great-great-... grandfathers.

Takeaway for the Seder: Use as much acting as possible. We should be dressing up with costumes on the Pesach night, not on Purim! Get the children to dress up, and act like the Israelites who left Egypt. There are few things that could be more fun, and few things would make them feel in their skin that they are, really, related to those individuals who were slaves and then redeemed by God.

By our acting out that feeling of continuity, by our understanding that it was we, actually, who left Egypt, by our understanding that we are all one People—all Jews today, as well as all Jews through history—, and by transmitting this understanding to our children, Judaism forever survives the trials of time.

Excuse Me, Do You Have the Time?

Rabbi Adam Sabzevari

In *Parashat Bo*, the Jewish people receive their first *mitzvah* as a nation: “לְכֶם הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לְכֶם רֵאשׁוּת הַחֹדָשִׁים רֵאשׁוֹן הוּא—לְכֶם הַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִי לְחֹדֶשׁ הַשָּׁנָה—*this month shall be to you the beginning of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year*” (*Shemot* 12:2). Hashem tells us that the month in which we left Egypt - the month of *Nissan* - will forever be the first month of the year. The exodus from Egypt marks the birth of our nation, and for this reason, *Nissan* is the first month of the year. This serves to remind us always of the great miracles and acts of kindness Hashem performed for us in our exodus from Egypt.

Additionally, our Sages point out another important *mitzvah*, which is hinted to in this very same verse. It is the responsibility of the Jewish High Court to establish when each month begins, based on eye-witness testimony of having seen the new moon. The Court decides when *Rosh Chodesh* is for each of the months, and since we decide when each month commences, we are in effect establishing the entire calendar. This means that we have the authority to establish when our holidays occur. The Torah prescribes that the holiday of Pesach is on the 15th day of *Nissan*. However, we decide when the month begins. Sukkot is on the 15th day of *Tishri*, but we decide when *Tishri* begins. Hashem has given us the authority to decide when the months begin, and consequently, when the holidays fall out. We are in charge of our own time (*Pesachim* 117b).

As slaves in Egypt, we lacked many luxuries. We weren't exactly driving the best cars, wearing the best

clothing, or eating the best food. (It's hard to imagine life without *ghormeh sabzi* - I'm not sure if I would have survived). But the most basic item that we lacked was time. We were NOT in charge of our own time. We would wake up when our masters would want us to. We would eat lunch whenever our master told us to. And our masters weren't kind enough to write up a schedule for us either. Our time, and our entire lives, were in the hands of our Egyptian masters.

It is for this reason that in the first *mitzvah* that Hashem gives to us as a Jewish nation He teaches us 'you are in charge of your time.' You have the authority to decide when the months begin, and you have the authority to tell Me when the holidays will take place. Your time is no longer in the hands of the Egyptians. You are now in charge of your time, and consequently, you are responsible for how you use your time.

In our first *mitzvah* as a nation, Hashem teaches us the important responsibilities that come with freedom. Hashem has empowered us with the gift of time and independence. However, "with great power comes great responsibility." Now that we have the authority to decide what we will do with our time, we will be held to a higher responsibility. *Be'ezrat Hashem*, may we use this precious gift of time wisely, not wasting even one moment. May we use it to produce and achieve, to live up to our potential.

Chag Sameach!

A Pesach Message¹
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The story of Pesach, of the Exodus from Egypt, is one of the oldest and greatest in the world. It tells of how one people, long ago, experienced oppression and were led to liberty through a long and arduous journey across the desert. It is the most dramatic story of slavery to freedom ever told, one that has become the West's most influential source-book of liberty. "Since the Exodus," said Heinrich Heine, the 19th century German poet, "Freedom has always spoken with a Hebrew accent."

We read in the *maggid* section of the Haggadah of Rabbi Gamliel who said that one who did not discuss the Pesach lamb, the *maztah* and the bitter herbs had not fulfilled their obligation of the Seder. Why these three things are clear: The Pesach lamb, a food of luxury, symbolizes freedom. The bitter herbs represent slavery due to their sharp taste. The *matzah* combines both. It was the bread the Israelites ate in Egypt as slaves. It was also the bread they left when leaving Egypt as free people.

It is not just the symbolism, but also the order these items are spoken about in the Haggadah that is interesting. First we speak of the Pesach lamb, then the *matzah*, and finally the bitter herbs. But this seems strange. Why do the symbols of freedom precede those of slavery? Surely slavery preceded freedom so it would be more logical to talk of the bitter herbs first? The answer, according to the Chassidic teachers, is that only to a free human people does

¹ Adapted from: http://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/pesach_message/.

slavery taste bitter. Had the Israelites forgotten freedom they would have grown used to slavery. The worst exile is to forget that you are in exile.

To truly be free, we must understand what it means to not be free. Yet 'freedom' itself has different dimensions, a point reflected in the two Hebrew words used to describe it, *chofesh* (חופש) and *cherut* (חרות). *Chofesh* is 'freedom from,' *cherut* is 'freedom to.' *Chofesh* is what a slave acquires when released from slavery. He or she is free from being subject to someone else's will. But this kind of liberty is not enough to create a free society. A world in which everyone is free to do what they like begins in anarchy and ends in tyranny. That is why *chofesh* is only the beginning of freedom, not its ultimate destination.

Cherut is collective freedom, a society in which my freedom respects yours. A free society is always a moral achievement. It rests on self-restraint and regard for others. The ultimate aim of Torah is to fashion a society on the foundations of justice and compassion, both of which depend on recognizing the sovereignty of God and the integrity of creation. Thus we say, 'Next year may we all be *bnei chorin* (free people),' invoking *cherut* not *chofesh*. It means, 'May we be free in a way that honors the freedom of all.'

The Pesach story, more than any other, remains the inexhaustible source of inspiration to all those who long for freedom. It taught that right was sovereign over might; that freedom and justice must belong to all, not some; that, under God, all human beings are equal; and that over all

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earthly power, the King of Kings, who hears the cry of the oppressed and who intervenes in history to liberate slaves.

It took many centuries for this vision to become the shared property of liberal democracies of the West and beyond; and there is no guarantee that it will remain so. Freedom is a moral achievement, and without a constant effort of education it atrophies and must be fought for again. Nowhere more than on Pesach, though, do we see how the story of one people can become the inspiration of many; how, loyal to its faith across the centuries, the Jewish people became the guardians of a vision through which, ultimately, ‘all the peoples of the earth will be blessed.’

